

11/21/22 Monday

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Harris Tells Marcos South China Sea 'Armed Attack' on Philippine Forces Would Trigger Defense Pact
By - Fantine Gardinier

US Vice President Kamala Harris met with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. on Monday, part of an effort to shore up US support in Southeast Asia amid its ongoing efforts to hem in China.

"We stand with you in defense of international rules and norms as it relates to the South China Sea," Harris told Marcos on the [western island of Palawan](#). "An armed attack on Philippine armed forces, vessels or aircrafts in the South China Sea would invoke US mutual defense commitments."

Harris' statement pushes up against existing interpretations of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Philippines. In 2019, the government of Marcos' predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, pushed to [renegotiate the MDT](#) to include the Kalayaan Island Group, a part of the Spratly Island chain that Manila claims.

Then-Philippine Defense Minister Delfin Lorenzana told Filipino media in 2019 that the American interpretation of the MDT was that it only covered the "metropolitan Philippines," a definition based on the territory Spain surrendered to the US at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Marcos' father, right-wing dictator Ferdinand Marcos, [first claimed](#) the islands were part of Palawan Province in 1974.

Marcos told Harris on Monday: "I do not see a future for the Philippines that does not include the United States." The Philippines has maintained a close relationship with the United States since being granted independence in 1946, after nearly half a century of American colonial rule.

Three other nations also have [claims over the tiny islands](#) in the South China Sea - Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam - as well as Taiwan, an autonomous island at the northern end of the waterway that Beijing claims as a rebellious province. The waterway handles some \$5 trillion annually in trade, and the seafloor surrounding the islands is believed to be rich in petroleum deposits, in addition to their strategic value.

Also on Monday, the Philippine navy accused China of seizing a piece of a Chinese rocket that was being towed by a Philippine naval boat after recovering the object in international waters. However, the Chinese side said the object was surrendered without a struggle.

"The Philippine side salvaged and towed the object first. After friendly consultation at the site, the Philippine side returned the object to China, and China expressed appreciation for that," said Mao Ning, a spokesperson for the Chinese People's Liberation Army. "There was no such thing as interception or forcible seizure at the scene."

The US has looked to use the territorial disputes to drive a wedge between China and the Southeast Asian states, which have increased their trade volume and infrastructural integration with China in recent years. A [National Defense Strategy](#) document recently published by the

Pentagon identified Beijing as the US' primary strategic rival, and emphasized the need to support regional powers against what it called China's "increasingly coercive actions to reshape the Indo-Pacific region and the international system to fit its authoritarian preferences."

When asked about Harris' visit to Palawan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning [told reporters](#): "We are not against the US's interaction with regional countries. But it should be good for regional peace and stability and not damaging to other countries' interests."

However, Beijing has worked to emphasize its equal standing with partner nations in its bilateral and multilateral reactions. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Bangkok, Thailand, two days before the Harris-Marcos meeting, Chinese President Xi Jinping said Beijing would "open its door wider" to regional integration, not close the door or hesitate.

Xi also spoke with Marcos at the summit, with the Philippine leader reportedly pledging that his nation would not "choose sides" in diplomacy and would jointly "resist unilateralism and bullying acts," according to a Chinese readout of the meeting. The Philippine readout did not mention the exchange, but noted they discussed plans for Marcos' state visit to China in January.

Harris also met with Xi in Bangkok, where she reiterated what US President Joe Biden said at the G20 summit in Bali a week earlier: "we must maintain open lines of communication to responsibly manage the competition between our countries."

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As EU's Oil Embargo Nears, West Looks to Crack Down on 'Leakage' in Anti-Russia Sanctions
- Report

By - Fantine Gardinier

As the European Union rushes to comply with Washington's embargo of Russian energy exports, Washington is looking for other ways to tighten the screws on Moscow, such as cracking down on enforcement of anti-Russian sanctions.

Despite extensive sanctions imposed on Russia by US-aligned nations following the launch of its special operation in Ukraine in February 2022, there have not been the precipitous drops in Russian energy exports for which they had hoped. Now, efforts are being made to tighten the noose.

"We want to avoid circumvention, both within Europe and then with third countries," Mairead McGuinness, whose European Commission office oversees the bloc's sanctions policy, told US [media](#) about anti-Russian sanctions. "The longer we have any leakage...the more difficult it is to see things coming to a conclusion."

The European Union has struggled to follow Washington's Russian energy boycott, since the bloc once bought nearly half its gas from Russia and many member states have [seen sizable protests](#) against further declines in purchases. By December 5, the EU plans to totally end its importation of Russian crude oil, followed by a total ban on all Russian energy products in January.

Russia's Gazprom halted liquified natural gas (LNG) from going through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline in early September, thanks to a unilateral price cap imposed on the product, and weeks later a mysterious undersea explosion rendered the pipeline inoperable.

However, the US quickly ended its consumption of Russian gas and petroleum in March, thanks to its smaller import volume, but that didn't stop gas prices from skyrocketing in the US anyway. The Biden administration has spent the time since then pressuring other nations to abide by that boycott, including insisting that neutral nations like South Africa pick a side.

US Treasury officials have also traveled far and wide, pushing the sanctions on a more personal level. Earlier this month, US Treasury Secretary Janet [Yellen helped push](#) the Group of 7 (G7) to adopt the long-discussed price cap on Russian petroleum, and last month, Yellen's deputy, Elizabeth Rosenberg, [flew to Japan to pressure](#) the heads of leading Arab banks to crack down on alleged Russian money laundering in Middle Eastern countries.

However, the more nations are pressured to sever trade relations with Russia, the more Washington [risks alienating itself](#). US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was [pointedly rejected](#) by his South African counterpart after he flew to Pretoria to encourage South Africa to end its joint projects with Russia, and the pressures put on Arab states by the grain shortages created by Kiev and by the US' demands to increase oil output are [not bringing them any closer](#) to Washington.

In addition, European nations are continuing to face social pressures associated with their support for Ukraine, including protests over the rising costs of living created by gas price hikes and inflation.

New trade statistics [revealed on Monday](#) that the United Kingdom, no longer an EU member state but still a NATO ally, has imported nearly \$1 billion in Russian petroleum since March.

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Alleged Gunman Faces Murder, Hate Crimes Charges for Shooting at Colorado LGBTQ Bar That Killed 5

By - Fantine Gardinier

Recent months have seen a sharp spike in attacks on LGBTQ institutions and venues by right-wing groups in the US, alongside increasing attempts to associate LGBTQ people with "groomers," a term that refers to how pedophiles lure children into trusting them so they can take sexual advantage of the child.

According to local media reports on Monday, 22-year-old Anderson Lee Aldrich is set to face five murder charges and five additional hate crime charges in connection with a mass shooting at an LGBTQ venue on Saturday night.

The shooting happened at Club Q in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where Aldrich allegedly opened fire with a long rifle and a handgun. Five people were killed and another 25 wounded in the attack, which ended when bar customers rushed Aldrich, tackled him to the ground, and seized his weapon, according to local reports.

"I don't know exactly what I did, I just went into combat mode," one bar patron, a US Army veteran, told the [New York Times](#) about his response during the attack. "I just know I have to kill this guy before he kills us."

Investigators have not yet released information about an alleged motive for the attack. It is just one of several in recent days across the US.

In New York, police are looking for a man who [they say has thrown](#) a brick at an LGBTQ bar's windows four times in the last week, releasing security camera footage of his face. On Saturday, hours before the shooting in Colorado, there [was a confrontation](#) outside a bookstore in Denton, Texas, between right-wing anti-LGBTQ demonstrators and armed left-wing activists. The store was [hosting a book reading](#) event for children featuring books designed to present LGBTQ topics like gender identity for young minds.

Right-wing activists and politicians have tried to claim in recent months that LGBTQ topics are only suitable for adult consumption, and that presenting them to children is sexualization and "grooming," or pedophilia. Figures on social media have spread news about events, such as drag queen story hour, and the locations of medical clinics that cater to the needs of transgender youth, which pro-LGBTQ activists have blamed for a [sharp rise in attacks](#) on those establishments.

In one incident during LGBTQ Pride Month in June, over three dozen members of the self-described fascist militia group Patriot Front were arrested in the back of a moving truck on their way to disrupt a Pride event in an Idaho city park.

More than 200 bills seeking to restrict the rights of LGBTQ people have been introduced into state and federal legislatures over the last year.

Hours after the Colorado Springs shooting, LGBTQ communities commemorated the Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual event that honors the memory of all trans people killed in the previous year. Worldwide, [activists compiled](#) a list of 366 people, and in the US, 57 - two of whom were killed in the Colorado Springs shooting.

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Powerful Magnitude 7 Earthquake Strikes Solomon Islands, Tsunami Warning issued - USGS

An initial bulletin issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center warned that "hazardous tsunami waves" were possible for any coasts within 300 kilometers of the earthquake epicenter, which was registered some 15 kilometers south-west of Malango.

A magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck the Solomon Islands on Tuesday and has since prompted a tsunami warning, a bulletin from the US Geological Survey has revealed.

Registers recorded the quake as initially striking as a magnitude 7.3; however, it was later revised to a magnitude 7. The event is said to have emerged from a 13.6-kilometer depth.

An alert issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, reported that "hazardous tsunami waves" up to one meter above the tide level were being forecasted for some coasts in the region.

The nonprofit European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre later documented an aftershock measuring in at a magnitude 6.0. The agency noted the second quake came about four minutes after the initial earthquake. A third quake was registered at a magnitude 6.0 about 30 minutes after the first was documented.

Details on potential structural damages, or injuries and fatalities remain uncertain.

The latest report comes after a magnitude 5.6 quake struck Indonesia's West Java province and caused the deaths over 160 individuals. The Monday earthquake had hit at a depth of 10 kilometers.

The country's National Disaster Management Agency reported earlier that over 700 residents had sustained injuries, and that thousands had been left displaced after mass structural damages.

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Have Tides Turned in Biden's Favor? 71% of Democrats Say He Could Win Reelection
By - Mary Manley

Confidence in Democratic leadership is growing since the party won surprising victories in the midterm elections and were able to keep the Senate (though they lost the House) all while preventing a Republican "red wave" that failed to materialize.

US President Joe Biden's favorability for the 2024 presidential cycle has taken an upswing since Democrats were able to narrowly retain the Senate during the [midterm](#) elections, a recent poll by USA [Today-Ipsos](#) has detailed.

Biden, who has only hinted at potentially running for reelection in 2024, has seen his poll numbers jump since his party's victory earlier this November, particularly in the states of Pennsylvania, Nevada and Arizona.

At least 71% of Democratic voters now believe that Biden could win the 2024 race for the White House, compared to 60% who felt that way in August. Women voters and voters aged 18 to 34 are now looking at Biden with more optimism than they were in August. And now 50% of Democratic voters believe he should be their party's nominee, compared to just 44% who felt that way in August.

Polling on the perception that Biden can win in 2024, women voters changed their opinion drastically compared to when they were polled in August. Now, 71% believe he can win compared to 55% who thought the same in August, and 69% of voters aged 18 to 34 believe he can win compared to only 53% who previously thought so.

The poll, which was taken a week after Election Day, also reported losing ground for former President Donald Trump, who announced his 2024 presidential campaign earlier last [week](#).

While a majority of Republican voters still believe Trump would be a good president if reelected - specifically regarding his ability to "get things done," "stand up for the freedom and dignity of all Americans," "fight against woke corporations and cancel culture," and "fight for people he represents" - now less Republican voters are willing to see him winning the 2024 presidential election (75%) compared to 82% who believed he could in August.

Only 54% of Republican voters believe Trump should be the Republican nominee for the 2024 race compared to 59% who thought so in August. Those with children (64%) and those without college degrees (62%) are more likely than other Republican voters to believe Trump should be the Republican nominee for 2024.

In a recent [poll](#) conducted by Harvard CAPS/Harris, Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL) was closing the gap on Trump in a hypothetical 2024 Republican primary poll in which DeSantis stands at 28%, compared to Trump's 46% which fell nine points, while DeSantis gained 11 points. However, surveyors noticed DeSantis would have 46% of Republican voters supporting him if Trump was not running at all.

"Pre-midterms, Trump had an advantage with his base headed toward 2024," said Clifford [Young](#), the president of US Public Affairs at Ipsos. "Now, post-midterms, Trump has been winged and Democrats are more confident in Biden, setting this up to be a close fight. The race is on."

The top issue for all Americans when deciding who to vote for is inflation, the second biggest issue is gun violence, and climate change ranked as the third-most important issue. Political extremism was the fourth biggest issue for American voters, while abortion was the fifth-most important issue to Democratic voters, and the 10th issue for Republicans.

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Video: One Dead, at Least 22 Injured After Car Crashes Into Massachusetts Apple Store
By - Mary Manley

At about 10:45 a.m. local time on Monday 911 calls came pouring in from the Derby Street Shops in Hingham, a shopping center made up of 65 stores that borders the Massachusetts Bay and is 23 miles from Boston. An SUV had crashed into the shopping center's Apple store, striking multiple people and killing one person.

One [person](#) is dead and 22 other people are injured after an individual drove their 2019 Toyota 4runner into an Apple store, said Plymouth County District Attorney Tim Cruz in a Monday news conference.

South Shore Hospital in Weymouth is treating 17 patients from the crash who sustained "traumatic injuries" said hospital spokesperson Kristen Perfetuo, adding that some had to undergo surgery. South Shore had initially received 16 patients; however, an additional individual had walked to the building for treatment.

Boston Medical Center treated three other patients from the crash, and Brigham and Women's Hospital treated two others.

When Hingham police and fire personnel responded to the scene they determined the car had struck multiple people, as well as shattering the storefront's glass windows.

The person driving the car has not been identified, the DA's office announced, but added they were launching an investigation into the crash.

"This is an active and ongoing criminal investigation," Cruz said when asked about details regarding the driver of the crash. "We're not going to be in a position where we can guess or

speculate. We're going to go slow and steady like we always do in criminal investigations making sure we can get to the bottom of what occurred."

"My understanding is he's not been taken to the hospital as of yet," Cruz said. "He is, right now, with police officers."

According to Fire Chief Steve [Murphy](#) a few victims were "pinned against the wall by the vehicle." Seven fire engines and 14 ambulances responded to the scene, Murphy added, while first responders, co-workers and bystanders provided first aid to victims.

A man named Kevin Brady, 65, of New Jersey died at the scene of the crash, Cruz said. Apple said they were "devastated" by the "tragic loss of a professional who was onsite supporting recent construction at the store."

"Our hearts go out to our team members and customers who were injured and all of those who were affected by this terrible incident. We are doing everything we can to support our team members and customers at this very difficult time," said Apple in response to the crash.

The crash occurred just four days before "Black Friday," which typically marks the beginning of the holiday shopping season. "Obviously the Apple store's a very busy place, and it's Monday of a holiday week," Cruz said. "I don't exactly know how many people were in there. I'm sure that we will find out."

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Meteor Flashes Across Toronto's Night Sky Before Crashing Into Earth Near Niagara Falls
By - Mary Manley

The "fireball" marks the sixth time in history that a space object's impact on Earth has been predicted before touching down on land. The European Space Agency (ESA) shared a video of the meteor which resembled a shooting star that passed through on Saturday morning, lighting up the CN tower as it soared through the sky.

A meteor, which resembled a shooting star, passed through the night sky of Toronto early on Saturday morning. The meteor, named #C8FF042, was detected hours before it entered the atmosphere, a rare chunk of time to receive such a notice of an object before it enters Earth's sphere, said Sarah [Rugheimer](#), an associate professor of astrophysics at York University.

The meteor, which measured about 3.2 feet in diameter, became a virtual "fireball" as it soared over residents' homes after it first entered Earth's atmosphere at 3:27 a.m. Eastern Standard Time over Brantford, Ontario, the Minor Planet [Center](#) reported.

Thirty-three reports were made to the American Meteor Society (AMS) as the fireball was witnessed soaring across the skies of Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Ontario.

The fireball was brighter than the planet Venus in the morning or evening sky, said AMS. A fireball—or shooting star—is a term given to meteors exceptionally bright and can be seen over a large area.

"Objects causing fireballs are usually not large enough to survive passage through the Earth's atmosphere intact, although fragments, or meteorites, are sometimes recovered on the ground," said [NASA](#).

Since 2008, five other objects have been detected by astronomers before striking earth as a result of improved technology and global collaboration, said the ESA. The agency added that the capability to detect objects entering Earth's atmosphere is "rapidly [improving](#)."

The meteor was first detected by the Mount Lemmon Survey near Tucson, Arizona and landed near Niagara Falls where it may be discoverable said Mike [Hankey](#), a meteorite hunter with AMS.

"There is a chance if there are meteorites that survived that they might be recoverable near Grimsby, Ontario, or St. Catharines, Ontario, near the Niagara Falls area," Hankey said. Between 40 and 100 tons of space material strike Earth every day said the ESA, but most of these particles are very small. The [agency](#), which is developing new telescopes so it can see a wider range of objects, also has a mission to prepare for "asteroid deflection missions" in the event that a large object may impact Earth, or the cases of smaller objects, warn people to stay away from their windows which may break during an explosion.

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DeSantis Closes Gap in New Poll Week After Trump Announces He's Running for President
By - Mary Manley

Last week, former US President Donald Trump announced his bid for the 2024 presidential race in what he is touting as "America's comeback." Trump used the November 15 announcement at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Palm Beach, Florida, to also boast about inaccurate accomplishments during his term.

Florida's Republican Governor Ron DeSantis recently inched closer to closing the gap with former US President Donald Trump in regards to the 2024 presidential ticket, a new poll has revealed.

[Trump](#), who is hoping to become the first president that would ever serve two nonconsecutive terms, is polling at 46% in a new Harvard CAPS/Harris poll. His poll numbers shot down about nine points since last month as a growing number of Senate Republicans turned their back on the presidential candidate who they most likely view as too politically extreme to win the presidency for their party.

But Governor Ron DeSantis, who just won his gubernatorial run for reelection and is being eyed as a potential presidential candidate by members in his party, had his polling improve by 11 points since last month, bringing him to a 28% standing for a hypothetical 2024 Republican primary.

Though he is still significantly behind Trump in the poll, it underscores how low support for Trump has fallen. The former commander-in-chief was impeached twice, subpoenaed by the January 6 Committee, and relocated classified papers to his Mar-a-Lago home that were reclaimed by the Federal Bureau of [Investigation](#) after a raid had been conducted at the estate. And according to the poll, if Trump were to not run, DeSantis would have 46% of Republican voters supporting him.

"Month after month DeSantis has been rising and now he is cutting significantly into Trump," Mark Penn, the co-director of the Harvard CAPS-Harris Poll, said. "If they both run, this will be quite a race and Trump could well lose."

Support for Trump, 76, by other members of the GOP has also fallen since the results of the 2022 midterm elections, when so-called "MAGA Republicans" endorsed by Trump lost their respective races.

"There's no question that Donald Trump is a motivating factor for turnout when it comes to Democratic voters," said Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) in an interview at Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee headquarters.

"It depends what the party does. If the party continues to be following the Trump model and is Trumpian and doesn't go back to their more conservative roots of the traditional Republican Party, I will say, definitely that'll be a problem," he added.

[Trump](#) announced his candidacy for the 2024 presidential election on Tuesday during a speech in which he reportedly made more than 20 inaccuracies according to [CNN's](#) Daniel Dale and Paul LeBlanc. Earlier this month, the former president attacked his rival, calling him an "[average](#)" Republican governor and claimed his win in the 2018 gubernatorial race was owed to Trump himself.

"What you learn is all that's just noise. And really what matters is are you leading? Are you getting in front of issues? Are you delivering results for people? And are you standing up for folks? And if you do that, then none of that stuff matters," [DeSantis](#) told a reporter last week in response to Trump's increasing attacks on the 44-year-old governor.

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City of Atlanta Agrees to Pay \$1 Million to Rayshard Brooks' Family – Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Atlanta's city council voted 15-0 to pay \$1 million to the family of Rayshard Brooks on Monday, NBC News reported.

"Although the children of Mr. Brooks have lost their father, settling the case will undoubtedly assist them with future plans as they come of age," lawyers representing Brooks' family said in a statement, according to NBC's Atlanta affiliate WXIA.

The 27-year-old Black man was shot by the police during a struggle after they responded to reports that he had fallen asleep in his car at a Wendy's drive-thru in 2020.

The settlement comes about three months after a special prosecutor declined to pursue criminal charges against the two officers involved in the case, saying they had "committed no crimes" and their use of deadly force was "reasonable."

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US Urges Kosovo, Serbia to Take Immediate Steps to De-Escalate Tensions - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The United States urges the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia to take immediate steps to de-escalate tensions regarding Pristina's controversial policy on car plates, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

Kosovo's authorities require that local Serbs re-register their car plates, demanding that they feature the EU-standard letter code of RKS (Republic of Kosovo) instead of KM, the Serbian identifier for the disputed region of Kosovska Mitrovica on the border. The deadline for the re-registration was October 31.

"The United States is disappointed that the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia failed to agree with EU High Representative Borrell today on a solution to the current crisis in Kosovo," Price said in the release on Monday. "We urge Prime Minister [Albin] Kurti to work with EU High Representative [Josep] Borrell and EU Special Representative [Miroslav] Lajcak to reach a fair compromise."

Price said Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic must make concessions to ensure they do not jeopardize years of peace in an already fragile region.

The United States, along with the European Union, calls on Kosovo to immediately suspend any planned measures that would escalate tensions, including the imposition of vehicle fines, Price said.

Kosovo and Serbia should refrain from taking provocative steps, fulfill their obligations under the EU facilitated dialogue and engage constructively to reach a sustainable solution, Price added.

On August 27, Belgrade and Pristina reached an EU-brokered compromise deal on entry and exit regulations. Serbia agreed to abolish entry-exit documents for Kosovo identification papers holders, while Kosovo agreed not to introduce them for Serbian citizens. Belgrade maintains the move is only aimed at streamlining border crossing and does not mean that Serbia recognizes Kosovo's independence.

Earlier on Monday, Borrell held a summit for Belgrade and Pristina amid escalating tensions in Kosovo that was attended by Vucic, Kurti and Lajcak. Vucic later said that no progress was made at the meeting.

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Office of Congressional Ethics Recommends Review of Gift Solicitation by Senior Democrat
WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Democratic Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Chair of the House Oversight Committee, was referred for further investigation by the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) for potentially soliciting or accepting impermissible gifts, OCE said in a report.

"The [OCE] Board recommends that the [House Ethics] Committee further review the above allegation concerning Rep. Maloney because there is substantial reason to believe that she solicited or accepted impermissible gifts associated with her attendance at the Met Gala," the report, released on Monday, said.

The referral was transmitted to the House Ethics Committee on June 23. The matter is under review by the committee, with the probe being extended on October 7 to allow more time to gather information, the panel said in a statement on Monday.

Maloney allegedly requested an invitation to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Met Gala in potential violation of House rules, the OCE report said.

A letter sent by attorneys representing Maloney to the House Ethics Committee in July claimed that the congresswoman did not impermissibly solicit an invitation to the event.

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Republican Lawmaker Says Identified Over 50 States Where Biden Family Sought Business

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US Congressman James Comer, lead Republican on the House of Representatives Oversight Committee, said that the panel has identified more than 50 countries in which the family of US President Joe Biden sought to conduct business.

"GOP [Republican Party] oversight has identified over 50 countries the Biden family sought business in. The American people deserve to know if Joe Biden has been compromised by any of these transactions. Republicans will uncover the truth," Comer said on Monday.

Last week, Comer announced that the Oversight Committee will lead an investigation into business dealings connected to Biden and his family once Republicans take control of the chamber next year.

Comer alleges the Biden family has accumulated more than 150 suspicious activity reports with the US Treasury Department, with the congressman claiming possession of two of them.

In an interview with US media on Monday, Comer characterized Biden's son Hunter as an "influence peddler." Comer said Biden received indirect benefit from US adversaries, including Russia and China.

Questions surrounding the Biden family's foreign business dealings arose following the release of the contents of a laptop belonging to Hunter Biden, which had been abandoned at a computer repair store in Delaware.

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White House Says Hopes Railroad Union Talks Continue in Good Faith to Avert Shutdown

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration hopes railroad union negotiations continue in good faith in order to avert a national rail shutdown that could happen by early December if issues are not resolved, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said during a press briefing.

One of the two largest rail unions in the United States, SMART-TD, voted to reject a national rail agreement, which raises the possibility of a strike starting on December 9.

"We continue to urge both sides to finish their work in good faith and avoid even the threat of a shutdown," Jean-Pierre said on Monday.

The White House is preparing contingency plans for all possible outcomes from the ongoing railroad union negotiations, Jean-Pierre said.

On Sunday, SMART-TD train and engine service members voted to reject the tentative agreement with Class I railroads from September 15, while yardmaster members upheld it. Members of the other major rail union, BLET, also ratified the agreement.

SMART-TD and BLET comprise half of the unionized workforce on the major freight railroads. The five-year agreement in question addresses rates of pay, health and welfare, and other fringe benefits for approximately 24,000 locomotive engineers and other rail workers.

Representatives from SMART-TD will now return to the bargaining table with the National Carriers Conference Committee, which represents railroad management, to negotiate new terms for its train and engine service members.

If there is a strike by SMART-TD or any of the other three rail unions that have rejected proposed contracts with the carriers, BLET and the other eight rail unions that have ratified agreements pledged to lawfully honor their picket lines.

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White House Has No Comment On Musk Reinstating Trump Account On Twitter - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The White House does not have any comment on the decision of billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to reinstate the Twitter account of former US President Donald Trump, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Monday.

"We are just not going to comment on Twitter's business practices," Jean-Pierre said.

On Saturday, Twitter reinstated Trump's account, which was suspended last year following the January 6, 2021 events at the US Capitol. Musk announced after the completion of his poll on whether to reinstate Trump on Twitter that "The people have spoken. Trump will be reinstated. Vox Populi, Vox Dei."

Over 15 million Twitter users participated in Musk's 24-hour poll this weekend on whether to restore Trump's page, with 51.8% having expressed support for Trump's reinstatement, while 48.2% voted against it.

Trump said on social media on Saturday, commenting on Musk's poll, that he was going to stick with his own Truth Social platform. "Vote now with positivity, but don't worry, we aren't going anywhere. Truth Social is special!" Trump wrote.

Trump was banned both from Twitter and Facebook (prohibited in Russia as an extremist organization) following the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. The platforms deemed that his activities in relation to the event violated their policies. The former president later launched a new social network Truth Social to fight Big Tech censorship and protect the right of free speech and expression.

On October 28, Musk finalized the acquisition of Twitter, which cost him \$44 billion. Following the takeover, Musk changed the company's day-to-day operations, including the termination of Twitter's executives who were responsible for the platform's privacy and cybersecurity, and thousands of regular Twitter employees. The significant policy changes have caused a wave of concern, including from high-ranking US officials. On November 4, Biden said that Twitter is spreading "lies" across the world.

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Oil Closes Off 10-Month Lows as Saudis Deny OPEC+ Output Hike Coming

NEW YORK, November 22 (Sputnik) - Oil prices fell again and extended their losses of the past two weeks, although benchmark crude contracts closed well off the ten-month lows that hit earlier on Monday after Saudi Arabia denied an output hike was coming from global producers. US media reported on Monday that the oil-producing alliance OPEC+ was working on a production hike of 500,000 barrels per day to announce at its monthly meeting on December 4. The report, along with headlines about more coronavirus-triggered lockdowns in China, pushed US crude benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) to a January low of \$75.30, while Brent, the global oil gauge, hit a February trough of \$82.36.

"It is well-known that OPEC+ does not discuss any decisions ahead of the meeting," Abdulaziz said, shooting down the Journal report.

OPEC+ is an alliance that bands OPEC, or the 13-member Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, with 10 other oil producers steered by Russia.

Oil prices also came off their lows after Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak reiterated Moscow's stance of not selling its oil to nations that participate in the oil price cap devised by the collective West to limit Russia's funding for its military campaign in Ukraine. Novak also said that in the event of an oil price cap, Russia may also reduce its production – a statement that arguably helped crude prices recover.

"Lower supply will be the result from a price cap on Russian oil," Novak added.

WTI recovered most of its early losses after the remarks by Abdulaziz and Novak. The US crude benchmark settled at \$79.73 a barrel, down 35 cents, 0.4%. Global closed at \$87.45, down 17 cents, or 0.2%, on the day. Both benchmarks had fallen some 5% earlier in the session.

Notwithstanding Monday's recovery, oil prices remain significantly lower from the near \$100 per barrel reached by Brent and the \$93 plus reached by WTI earlier this month after a 2-million-barrel per day production cut that OPEC+ said would begin from November 1.

The question of what OPEC+ will decide when it meets on December 5 is still open. But, analysts speculate that a further cut might be on the cards, with Abdulaziz indicating on Monday that OPEC+ will be "ready to intervene" if there's a need to "take further measures by reducing production to balance supply and demand."

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White House Has No Comment On Musk Reinstating Trump Account On Twitter - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - The White House does not have any comment on the decision of billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to reinstate the Twitter account of former US President Donald Trump, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Monday.

"We are just not going to comment on Twitter's business practices," Jean-Pierre said.

On Saturday, Twitter reinstated Trump's account, which was suspended last year following the January 6, 2021 events at the US Capitol. Musk announced after the completion of his poll on whether to reinstate Trump on Twitter that "The people have spoken. Trump will be reinstated. Vox Populi, Vox Dei."

Over 15 million Twitter users participated in Musk's 24-hour poll this weekend on whether to restore Trump's page, with 51.8% having expressed support for Trump's reinstatement, while 48.2% voted against it.

Trump said on social media on Saturday, commenting on Musk's poll, that he was going to stick with his own Truth Social platform. "Vote now with positivity, but don't worry, we aren't going anywhere. Truth Social is special!" Trump wrote.

Trump was banned both from Twitter and Facebook (prohibited in Russia as an extremist organization) following the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. The platforms deemed that his activities in relation to the event violated their policies. The former president later launched a new social network Truth Social to fight Big Tech censorship and protect the right of free speech and expression.

On October 28, Musk finalized the acquisition of Twitter, which cost him \$44 billion. Following the takeover, Musk changed the company's day-to-day operations, including the termination of Twitter's executives who were responsible for the platform's privacy and cybersecurity, and thousands of regular Twitter employees. The significant policy changes have caused a wave of concern, including from high-ranking US officials. On November 4, Biden said that Twitter is spreading "lies" across the world.

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Markets Overreacting to US Rate Hikes - Federal Reserve Official

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - US financial markets have been overreacting to the Federal Reserve's monetary tightening, San Francisco Fed chief Mary Daly said, with the central bank likely to keep adding to interest rates until it achieves its target for manageable inflation.

"Financial markets are acting like the Federal Reserve's benchmark interest rate is around 6%," Daly said in a live-streamed discussion on the US economy on Monday.

Runaway inflation had prompted the Fed to add 375 basis points to interest rates since March. Prior to that, rates peaked at 25 basis points as the Fed slashed them to nearly zero after the global COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

Daily pointed out that interest rates currently stand at a peak of 4%, not 6%.

The San Francisco Fed chief said there was no evidence of a wage price spiral but also said it was far too early to say that inflation had peaked and was beginning to cool.

Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) expanded by 7.7% during the year to October, growing at its slowest pace in nine months. Prior to that, the CPI grew by 9.1% during the 12 months to June, the fastest in four decades.

Fed policy-makers on the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) are to meet on December 13 for their monthly decision on interest rates. Easing growth in the CPI and other inflation pressures have triggered speculation that the Fed could opt for a 50-basis point hike next month, versus November's 75-basis point hike.

Asked what the FOMC was likely to do in December, Daly replied: "I'm not sure what hike the Fed should do. Nothing is off the table for the December FOMC. I am on the hawkish side of the Fed policymaker spectrum. At some point, it will be right to slow the rate hike pace. The Fed is still very far from its inflation target. If inflation data does not cool, the Fed may raise rates beyond 5%. Rates peaking between 4.75% and 5.25% are reasonable."

Most Fed officials have said FOMC policy needs to be "sufficiently restrictive" toward inflation. Economists, however, caution that the Fed risks pushing the United States into a deep recession.

The US economy did sputter in the first two quarters of the year, with back-to-back negative growths of 1.6% and 0.6% in GDP that placed the nation in a recession. Third-quarter GDP, however, came in at 2.6%, raising questions of whether another economic slowdown was likely or a soft-landing was possible instead.

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US Grants \$7.5 Million to Philippine Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies - Harris

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – US Vice President Kamala Harris announced \$7.5 million in funding for Philippine maritime law enforcement agencies on Monday during her historic visit to Palawan, the White House said in a press release.

The assistance will "increase [the agencies'] capacity and capabilities to counter IUU fishing, improve maritime domain awareness, and provide search and rescue support," the release stated.

Harris also announced a new initiative to upgrade and expand the Philippine Coast Guard's vessel traffic management system to improve maritime safety. The US will also provide the Philippines with near-real-time data under the Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative to deliver a common operating picture of waterways in order to promote transparency and detect and counter illicit activities.

The highest-ranking US official to ever visit Palawan, Harris is visiting the Philippines to cement its support as an ally in “upholding the international rules-based order” in the South China Sea. This includes issues such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, unimpeded lawful commerce, peaceful resolution of disputes, and the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea.

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US Federal Prosecutors Probed FTX Months Before Crypto Exchange Collapsed - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - Federal prosecutors in the United States began probing cryptocurrency exchange FTX months before it filed for bankruptcy and received attention from lawmakers, Bloomberg reported, citing people familiar with the investigation. The US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York worked on a probe of FTX's cryptocurrency platform for several months before news of its collapse broke, the report said on Monday.

The federal prosecutors were already investigating FTX's exchange operations as part of a broader examination of cryptocurrency platforms with US and offshore arms, the report said. The US attorney's office in Manhattan is known for handling complex financial crime cases, including many involving cryptocurrency, according to the report.

FTX's collapse has led to increased scrutiny of their practices by lawmakers as well. A group of Republicans sent a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken last week requesting information on possible financial ties between the Democratic Party and Ukrainian government via FTX.

The lawmakers said that billions of taxpayer dollars sent to Ukraine were potentially invested in FTX, whose owner, Sam Bankman-Fried, contributed millions of dollars to Democrats in the 2022 midterm election cycle.

The US is likely to tighten regulatory pressure on cryptocurrencies following the collapse of FTX, which has sent ripples through the digital asset market, industry experts told Sputnik.

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Former Hawaii Corrections Supervisor Sentenced to 12 Years for Assault - US Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) - A former employee of the Hawaii Community Correctional Center will serve 144 months in prison for assaulting an incarcerated individual and for his role in leading a conspiracy over several years to cover up the abuse, the US Justice Department said.

"[O]n June 15, 2015, Jonathan Taum, 50, supervised his two co-defendants and a third correctional officer while they transported an inmate across the facility," the Justice Department said in a press release on Monday. "The inmate became frightened in the course of the transfer and Taum's fellow officers took the non-violent inmate to the ground and repeatedly punched and kicked him in the face, head, and body."

The officers broke the inmate's jaw, orbital socket and nose, the release said.

"Taum oversaw over the next several years a cover-up conspiracy that included writing false reports, submitting false statements to internal affairs and providing false testimony to disciplinary board members," the release said.

US Attorney Clare Connors for the District of Hawaii said in the release that protecting the civil rights of everyone in the community, including inmates, is at the heart of the US system of justice.

"Supervisors in our correctional facilities are held to a higher standard of responsibility and as this case demonstrates, we will prosecute those who criminally violate the civil rights of those in their custody," Connors added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, November 22 (Sputnik) -

ENERGY MARKETS

* Saudi Arabia denies reports that it is discussing with other OPEC countries an increase in production by 500,000 barrels per day, and plans to maintain the current quota reduction by 2 million barrels per day until the end of 2023, Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud said on Monday.

* A court in Poland overturned the decision to impose fines on Gazprom and its European partners for the construction of Nord Stream 2 pipeline, the Polish Office for Competition and Consumer Protection said.

* Politicization of the energy sphere can only lead to a shortage of resources on the market, the price cap on Russian oil is such an example, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

* Transneft is currently studying the statement from Ukrtransnafta that it plans to raise the tariff for oil transit through the territory of Ukraine, Transneft spokesman Igor Demin told Sputnik,

* Russia will not supply oil and petroleum products to countries that will apply the price cap principle, Moscow will redirect supplies to market-oriented partners or reduce production altogether, Novak said.

UNSC MEETING ON NORTH KOREA

* Russia regrets seeing its Western partners consistently ignore North Korea's calls for the United States to cease its hostile activities and start a dialogue, Russian Deputy Representative to the United Nations Anna Evstigneeva said on Monday.

- * China urges members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to consider its joint resolution with Russia on North Korea to mitigate the humanitarian situation in the country and promote a settlement in the region, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Zhang Jun said.
- * The United States believes that Russia and China are responsible for the UN Security Council's failure to act in response to North Korea's continued missile launches, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said.
- * The United States is planning to propose a UNSC presidential statement in order to hold North Korea accountable for missile launches, Thomas-Greenfield said.

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

- * The United States is tracking closely the video of Ukrainian troops killing captured Russians and urges Ukraine to abide by its international obligations, the US State Department said on Monday.
- * Russia will search for the killers of Russian prisoners of war, they must be found and punished, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

ZAPORIZHZHIA NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

- * Western countries have given a carte blanche to Ukraine to continue reckless attempts to cause irreparable damage to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP), which makes them complicit in Kiev's crimes, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Monday.
- * Experts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) examined the damage done to the ZNPP caused by Ukraine's shelling and reported their findings to the agency, an adviser to the head of Rosenergoatom, a subsidiary of Russian state nuclear energy corporation Rosatom, Renat Karchaa, said.
- * The IAEA should take a responsible position and clearly indicate those, who are carrying out attacks against the ZNPP; Russia has sent all available information on this matter to the agency, Zakharova said.
- * Kiev is "playing with fire" by carrying out provocations against the ZNPP and resuming its shelling, Zakharova said.
- * The experts of the IAEA found widespread damage done to the territory of the ZNPP, the agency said in a statement.

RUSSIA-CUBA RELATIONS

- * Russian President Vladimir Putin and Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez will hold negotiations in Moscow on November 22 as the latter is on a visit to Russia, the Kremlin said on Monday.
- * Cuba feels the support of Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin personally, despite all geopolitical upheavals in the world, and Havana and Moscow could further strengthen economic relations and bilateral ties, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said.

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US Federal Judge Denies Psaki's Request to Quash Subpoena in Tech Collusion Case - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge denied a request by former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki to quash a subpoena issued against her in a case alleging that she and other top Biden administration officials colluded with tech companies to suppress disfavored content, according to a court order filed Monday.

In May, states including Missouri filed a lawsuit against administration members including Psaki, President Joe Biden himself, presidential medical adviser Anthony Fauci, Homeland Security chief Alejandro Mayorkas and others alleging that they coerced or colluded with social media companies to suppress disfavored content by labeling it "disinformation" or "misinformation." The lawsuit alleges the officials worked to suppress news stories such as those about Hunter Biden's laptop ahead of the 2020 election, the COVID-19 "lab leak" theory and concerns about election integrity.

Psaki and other defendants filed a motion to try and avoid depositions authorized in the case.

"This Court previously authorized Plaintiffs to take Psaki's deposition. Much of Psaki and Federal Defendants' argument is moving the Court reconsider its previous ruling that found 'extraordinary circumstances' exist to allow Plaintiffs to take Psaki's deposition... To the extent Psaki and Federal Defendants ask this Court to reconsider prior ruling authorizing Psaki's deposition, that request is denied," the filing said.

The order denying the motion to quash and stay the deposition was issued by Judge Terry Doughty of the US District Court for the Western District of Louisiana.

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Former US Political Staffer Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Defraud Campaigns—Justice Dept.
WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – A former US staffer in the New Jersey Senate has pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to defraud campaigns and political action committees (PAC), the US Justice Department said on Monday.

"A Union County man who previously served as a staff member in the New Jersey Senate today admitted his role in a conspiracy to falsely inflate the invoices that a political consultant submitted to various campaigns, political action committees, and IRS [Internal Revenue Service] 501(c)(4) organizations," the department said in a press release.

Antonio Teixeira, 43, has pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of tax evasion, the department said.

It is alleged that from 2014 to 2018, the defendant conspired with Sean Caddle, and his political consulting firms, to defraud a number of campaigns, political action committees, and IRS organizations of \$107,800, according to the department.

While serving as a former New Jersey state senator's chief of staff, Teixeira allegedly used his position to exert pressure over the political consultants that the campaigns and organizations hired and the budgets they received, the department said.

As part of the conspiracy, Teixeira and Caddle inflated Caddle's consulting firms' invoices to the campaigns, PACs, and IRS organizations, according to the report. As a result of the scheme, Teixeira received over \$100,000 and used it for personal expenses without reporting on the tax forms.

If found guilty, Teixeira faces up to 25 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000, the Justice Department said. Sentencing will take place on March 27, 2022.

In January, Sean Caddle, a former New Jersey Democratic political consultant and aide to former state senator Ray Lesniak, pleaded guilty to hiring two individuals to kill a former associate. Sentencing in Caddle's case is scheduled for December 7.

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New Manhattan District Attorney Revisits Trump Case Involving Hush Money Payment - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The new Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg will revisit former President Donald Trump's case involving a hush money payments made to adult film star Stormy Daniels, who claims to have had an affair with the former US president, the New York Times reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The report said, citing a lawyer, that the district attorney's office is optimistic about building a case against Trump regarding the hush payment.

Prosecutors are trying to get former chief financial officer of the Trump Organization, Allen Weisselberg, to cooperate with the investigation, the report aid.

The report added that prosecutors may consider a new round of charges against Weisselberg to force him to work with investigators.

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Plurality of Likely US Voters Believe Republican Control of House Good for Country - Poll
WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - A plurality of likely voters in the United States believe that Republican control of the US House of Representatives is good for the country, a new Rasmussen Reports poll revealed on Monday.

Nearly half of the respondents, 48%, said they believe a Republican majority in the House of Representatives is good for the United Sates and more than one-third, 34%, said it is bad for the country, a release on the poll said.

Another 14% of respondents said that Republicans taking control of the US House will not make much difference at all, the release said.

In contrast to the US House, a plurality of voters, 44%, said that they believe it is good that Democrats retained control of the Senate, while 41% said it was bad, the release said.

An equal proportion of likely voters blamed the Republican leadership and former US President Donald Trump for the party's failure to produce a "red wave" in the midterm elections, with 33% each, the release said.

Another 16% blamed individual candidates falling short of expectations and 11% blamed nobody, the release added.

The survey of 1,000 likely US voters was conducted on November 16-17 and has a margin of error of plus/minus 3 percentage points.

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US Congresswoman Greene Says Twitter Unblocked Her Account on Social Media Platform

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said on Monday that Twitter has unblocked her account after being permanently suspended from the social media platform in January.

"I'm the only member of Congress the unelected big tech oligarchs permanently banned. On January 2, 2022, they violated my freedom of speech and ability to campaign and fundraise crying 'COVID misinformation.' My account is back," Greene said.

Twitter suspended the Republican congresswoman from Georgia several times, the last time in January when her account was blocked permanently for alleged misinformation about COVID-19.

The social media platform Facebook (outlawed in Russia as an extremist organization) also suspended Greene two days later.

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US Indicts 2 Estonian Nationals in \$575Mln Cryptocurrency Scheme - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - The United States has indicted two Estonian nationals in a \$575 cryptocurrency and money laundering scheme, the US Justice Department said on Monday.

"Two Estonian citizens were arrested in Tallinn, Estonia, yesterday on an 18-count indictment for their alleged involvement in a \$575 million cryptocurrency fraud and money laundering conspiracy," the Justice Department said in a press release.

Estonian nationals Sergei Potapenko and Ivan Turogin have both been charged with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, 16 counts of wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, the release said.

Potapenko and Turogin allegedly defrauded hundreds of thousands of people by inducing them into entering fraudulent equipment rental contracts via a cryptocurrency mining service called HashFlare, the release said.

The victims were then required to invest in a virtual currency bank called Polybius Bank that was not actually a bank that paid out dividends to its investors, the release also said.

Instead, Potapenko and Turogin allegedly stole \$575 million for their victims through this multi-faceted scheme and used the funds to purchase real estate and luxury cars, the release added.

If convicted, the Potapenko and Turogin each face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, according to the release.

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Japan Naval Forces Successfully Hit Missile Targets With SM-3 Interceptors - Raytheon

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force has successfully intercepted short and medium-range ballistic missile targets with SM-3 interceptors for the first time, Raytheon announced in a press release on Monday.

"During a demonstration here, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force successfully intercepted short and medium-range ballistic missile targets with SM-3 Block IB and SM-3 Block IIA interceptors," the release stated.

It was the first time that any non-US maritime service had intercepted targets with both variants of the interceptors and it was also the first time that any Japanese ship had fired a SM-3 Block IIA missile, Raytheon said.

"The demonstration was conducted in partnership with the U.S. Missile Defense Agency. Both types of interceptors are made by Raytheon Missiles & Defense, a Raytheon Technologies business," the release said.

The multi-day Japan Flight Test Aegis Weapon System-07 included engagements of ballistic missile targets with SM-3 and a next generation subsonic aerial target with SM-2 Block IIIB, Raytheon said.

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Bank of Canada Begins its 5-Year \$372Mln Ukraine Sovereignty Bond – Finance Ministry

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – The Bank of Canada has officially launched its 5-year C\$500 million Ukrainian Sovereignty Bond, the country's Ministry of Finance said on Monday.

"To offer Canadians an opportunity to directly support the brave people of Ukraine, the Government of Canada is today launching the \$500 million Ukraine Sovereignty Bond," Finance Canada said in a statement.

With the provided funds, the Ukrainian government will pay pensions, purchase fuel, and restore the country's energy grid, the statement added.

The bonds are in fact five-year regular ones, issued by the government, and will be given in denominations of C\$100. People interested must contact their financial institution between today and November 29, the statement reads.

Ottawa has partnered with major Canadian Banks to issue the bonds, including Canada Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), Bank of Montreal (BMO), Scotia Bank and the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), according to information made available by the ministry.

Finance Canada said the funds provided to Ukraine through these bonds cannot be used for military purposes.

"Consistent with the terms of Canada's financial assistance to Ukraine to date, the funds cannot be used for lethal activities or purchases and must be consistent with relevant sanctions laws and regulations," the statement continued.

In October, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau first announced Ottawa's intention to create the Ukrainian Sovereignty Bonds, for common citizens wanting to directly support Kiev in their war efforts.

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US State Dept. Says Discussions Underway on How to Form Tribunal on Russia

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - Discussions are underway on how to form a tribunal on Russia, with a United Nations-mediated option currently being reviewed, a US State Department official said on Monday.

"There are a few discussions now how it can be done. One is bilaterally with the United Nations," the State Department official said referring to a tribunal on alleged war and other crimes allegedly committed by Russia.

In September, European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that he supported the idea of creating an independent tribunal to investigate Russia's special military operation in Ukraine and the alleged war crimes committed there.

Russia has repeatedly said that such a tribunal would have nothing to do with justice and has specifically condemned Borrell's remarks.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine responding to requests from the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk to help them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops.

The United States and its allies - the so-called collective West - have imposed comprehensive sanctions against Russia while providing military and financial support to Ukraine in the amount of multiple billions of dollars.

In addition, the collective West has been accusing Russia of committing crimes in Ukraine, while Moscow has said that the special military operation only targets and destroys infrastructure used for military purposes.

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BAE Systems, Polish Industrial Group Sign Deal to Develop Combat Vehicles - Statement

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - BAE Systems has reached a deal with a large Polish industrial combine to jointly develop combat and recovery vehicles, the United Kingdom-based aerospace and defense contractor announced in a press release on Monday.

"Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa (PGZ) and BAE Systems today signed a memorandum of understanding on bilateral cooperation for combat and recovery vehicles," the release said. Both BAE Systems and PGZ will expand the scope of their cooperation to support the Polish military's modernization projects and work toward securing critical capabilities of life-cycle support in Polish defense industry facilities, the release said.

"The main area of cooperation is the M88 Armored Recovery Vehicle program, which is a key part of the M1A2 Abrams tank procurement program announced by the Polish Ministry of National Defense earlier this year," the release added.

The M88A2 recovery vehicle answers the need for a cost-effective, self-supporting 70-ton capable recovery system for armored units, according to the release.

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Second UN Humanitarian Convoy Delivers Supplies to Kherson - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) - A second United Nations humanitarian convoy delivered supplies to the city of Kherson, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Monday.

"Our humanitarian colleagues tell us that they successfully delivered a new interagency convoy of vital supplies to the people of Kherson today in addition of supplies that were delivered last week," Haq said during a press briefing.

The UN spokesperson noted that the 13-truck convoy prioritized the most urgent humanitarian needs of the more than 100,000 people who remain in Kherson.

Haq emphasized that Kherson residents are facing "tremendous challenges" with respect to access to food, water, electricity and healthcare.

The convoy brought enough medical kits to treat 100,000 patients, additional supplies for women's reproductive health, along with supplies for surgery, chronic diseases and trauma, he said.

In addition, Haq said the convoy brought significant amounts of food and water as well as blankets, sleeping bags and other supplies.

"They delivered nearly 2,300 solar lamps, which will help people in Kherson to have light at home as the city is cut off from energy supply," Haq added.

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Top US Bank JP Morgan Launches Crypto Wallet Amid Digital Coin Market Crash

NEW YORK, November 21 (Sputnik) - JPMorgan, the largest US banking group, has launched a cryptocurrency wallet amid a market crash for digital coins after the collapse of the cryptocurrency exchange FTX.

"JPMorgan's crypto wallet is now officially a registered trademark in the US," Blockworks, a trade journal for the crypto industry, said in a tweet.

Crypto wallets store so-called private keys to digital coins, keeping them safe and accessible. With such wallets, users can send, receive and spend cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin.

Bitcoin, the grandfather of digital coins, hit a two-year low of \$15,902 on Monday as most major cryptocurrencies fell sharply, from the two-week old contagion that followed the collapse of the FTX exchange operator on November 6.

Financially-strapped FTX filed for bankruptcy after rival Binance walked away from a deal to acquire the exchange operator.

JPMorgan owns JPMorgan Chase, the largest bank in the United States. With total assets of US\$3.95 trillion, Chase is the fifth largest bank in the world in terms of total assets. JPMorgan is also the world's largest banking group by market capitalization.

JPMorgan has been cautious thus far in including cryptocurrencies to its business. Some crypto industry analysts expressed surprise on Monday that the banking group would even establish a crypto wallet after the FTX debacle, given that JPMorgan Chief Executive Officer Jamie Dimon is one of the most outspoken critics and skeptics of the digital coin trade.

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Americans Must Work at Least 63 Hours To Make Typical Rent, 3 Hours More Than 2021
-Zillow

WASHINGTON, November 21 (Sputnik) – An American making an average wage has to work 63 hours to afford the typical average monthly rent, a new Zillow survey found Monday.

"An American making an average wage needs to work about 63 hours before earning enough to pay the typical monthly U.S. rent of \$2,040," according to a Zillow survey. "That is three hours more than they would have needed to work a year ago, and six hours more than before the pandemic in October 2019, a new Zillow analysis finds.

These figures demonstrate the increasing difficulties renters have in finding affordable places to rent in what experts acknowledge is a strong labor market.

"The average hourly wage has grown 23% over the past five years, but rents are up 36.9% over the same period," Zillow researchers said. "Renters in Miami need to work three full-time days more than they did five years ago to earn enough to pay the typical rent in that metro area."

Jeff Tucker, a senior economist with Zillow said even though the rental market has cooled this year, slowed growth in the cost of rentals has provided no real relief for renters.

"Rents were growing at a record pace for much of 2021, squeezing budgets for renters moving or renewing leases," said Tucker. "Now, it appears more people are opting to double up with roommates or family, which means more vacancies and pressure on landlords to price their units competitively, offering some hope of relief on the horizon. Rents fell last month for the first

time in two years, possibly the start of more price drops to come, or at least a signal that we are back to the usual seasonal rhythms of the rental market."

Analysts say that in October, the typical US rent saw the end of a two-year streak of unimpeded growth with a slight dip of 0.1 percent month-over-month to \$2,040. In February, annual rent growth peaked at a record 17.1 percent but has since slowed to 9.6 percent year-over-year growth. Renters in Miami face the greatest hurdles, needing to work 96 hours at the average wage to pay the typical rent. That is 24 hours more than Miami renters would have needed to work five years ago, representing the biggest gap among the 50 largest U.S. metro areas.

The rent crisis extends across several industries as well. According to Moneywise, 37 percent of real estate agents were unable to pay their rent in October, reflecting a cooling housing market, falling sales and pressure from high mortgage rates. Meanwhile, a new report from Alignable – a small business referral network – indicates that almost 40 percent of owners and operators of small businesses and 49 percent of restaurants couldn't pay their rent in October. Chuck Casto, Alignable's head of research, said the incomes of small business owners are "basically being eaten away by inflationary pressures."